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**DAILY EDITORIAL
ANALYSIS**

TOPIC

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INDIA'S SURPRISE BABY BUST IS A WARNING TO THE WORLD

Context

- According to the **Sample Registration System (SRS) Statistical Report** and **NFHS-5**, India's **Total Fertility Rate (TFR)** has fallen below the replacement level of **2.1**, reaching around **2.0** and **subsequently 1.9** signals that India may age and eventually shrink faster than previously anticipated.

TFR Statistics	
1950s	~6.0
1992-93 (NFHS-1)	3.4
2005-06 (NFHS-3)	2.7
2015-16 (NFHS-4)	2.2
2019-21 (NFHS-5)	2.0
2024 (SRS Statistical Report, Registrar General of India)	1.9

What is the 'Baby Bust'?

- A **baby bust** refers to a **sustained decline in fertility rates** resulting in fewer births than required to replace the existing population.
- India's Current Position:**
 - TFR Below Replacement Level (2.1):** Most States, including southern and western States, have fertility rates well below replacement levels.
 - Population growth is slowing significantly.
 - Future population stabilization may occur earlier than projected.

Why is India Experiencing a Fertility Decline?

- Rising Female Education:** Greater educational attainment delays marriage and childbirth, and increased workforce participation changes fertility preferences.
- Urbanisation:** Higher living costs discourage larger families, and smaller family norms are becoming widespread.
- Improved Access to Healthcare and Family Planning:** Expansion of reproductive health services, and better awareness and availability of contraception.
- Declining Infant and Child Mortality:** Families no longer need more births as insurance against child mortality.
- Aspirational and Lifestyle Changes:** Greater emphasis on quality of education and human capital investment per child.

Why is it a Warning to the World?

- Demographic Transition Can Be Faster Than Expected:** Many developing countries assume they have decades before facing population ageing.
 - India's experience shows fertility can fall rapidly once socio-economic conditions improve.
- Shrinking Workforce Risks:** A declining youth population can reduce labour supply, slow economic growth, and increase dependency ratios.
- Rising Fiscal Burden:** Governments may face higher pension expenditures, greater healthcare costs, and increased social security obligations.
 - Many developing nations may therefore 'grow old before they grow rich'.

- **Lessons from East Asia:** Countries such as Japan, South Korea, and China are already experiencing ageing populations, labour shortages, and low fertility traps.
 - ♦ India may face similar challenges in the coming decades.

Implications for India

- **Positive Outcomes:**
 - ♦ **Demographic Dividend (Short-Term):** Lower dependency burden, greater scope for investment in education and skills, and potential productivity gains.
 - ♦ **Better Human Development:** Improved maternal and child health, and enhanced investments per child.
- **Emerging Challenges:**
 - ♦ **Population Ageing:** Growing elderly population, and need for geriatric healthcare and long-term care systems.
 - ♦ **Regional Demographic Imbalances:** Southern States may age faster, and Northern States may continue contributing a larger share of the workforce.
 - ♦ **Labour Market Pressures:** Potential shortages in labour-intensive sectors, and need for productivity-led growth.
 - ♦ **Social Security Concerns:** Pension and healthcare systems require strengthening.

Government Initiatives and Policy Response

- **National Population Policy (NPP), 2000:** Focus on population stabilization through voluntary and informed choices.
- **Mission Parivar Vikas:** Targets high-fertility districts, and improves access to family planning services.
- **National Programme for Health Care of the Elderly (NPHCE):** Addresses emerging ageing-related healthcare needs.
- **Digital Health and Social Protection Measures:** Expansion of Ayushman Bharat, and strengthening healthcare infrastructure for future demographic changes.

What Should India Do?

- **Shift from Population Control to Population Management:** Focus on demographic sustainability rather than fertility reduction.
- **Invest in Human Capital:** Education, skill development, health and nutrition.
- **Encourage Female Labour Force Participation:** Childcare support, and flexible employment opportunities.
- **Prepare for Ageing:** Universal pension coverage, elderly healthcare infrastructure, and long-term care ecosystem.
- **Promote Productive Workforce Growth:** Labour reforms, technology adoption, and migration-friendly policies.

Daily Mains Practice Question

[Q] India's transition from population explosion to below-replacement fertility marks a significant demographic turning point. Examine the causes of India's declining fertility rate and discuss its socio-economic implications.

Source: Economist

